

I'm a Mac

(just a regular guy)

*a four part analysis in pictures and words
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THE MANY MACINTOSHES



Clockwise from Top Left: *The first Macintosh computer, launched in 1984; A Mackintosh: the raincoat from Britain; McIntosh Apples: Jeff Raskin's favourites; The MacIntosh Tartan: Scottish origins*

*"What's in a name? That which we call a rose
By any other name would smell as sweet;"
- William Shakespeare, Romeo and Juliet, II:2*

Once upon a time a Mackintosh was a rather unglamorous looking raincoat made in Britain. Then, on January 24, 1984, the word Macintosh (without the letter 'k') acquired a new meaning: a personal computer manufactured and sold by Apple Computers, Inc. This computer was sold with two applications developed by Apple, MacWrite and MacPaint. Thus was born the brilliant nickname that would stick to every subsequent computer product that Apple released – "Mac". In the development of Apple's products and their marketing, this nickname has played out in a delightfully unforeseen but meaningful way.

The origins of this inspired branding decision lay in the personal whim of an Apple employee. In 1979, Jeff Raskin first conceived of an easy-to-use, low cost computer for the average user. In his mind, this was going to be his favourite Apple product, and quite logically, he wanted to name it after his favourite apple, the McIntosh (also referred to as a "Mac").

Both the fruit and the raincoat get their names from Scottish progenitors. The mackintosh raincoat was named after Charles Mackintosh, the inventor of a method of water proofing. The fruit is named after John McIntosh, who discovered this particular apple cultivar growing on his farm in Canada. In Gaelic and Scots, the word "MacIntosh" is a patronymic that means "Son of the Chieftain". The word 'Mac' means "son" in those languages, and is thus a part of most Scottish surnames. By the 17th Century, the word "Mac" had passed into colloquial usage as an informal term of address to a man or a boy; much like the words "fellow" or "chap". A Mac, therefore, is just Average Joe, a regular guy.

THINKING DIFFERENT



On January 24th,
Apple Computer will introduce
Macintosh.
And you'll see why 1984
won't be like "1984"



Top: "1984": The commercial that
launched the Macintosh;
The Macintosh II: Snow White
Bottom: The original Indigo iMac G3;
Subsequently introduced colours.



But for the longest time, Apple didn't want to be a regular guy. In 1984, Steve Jobs' slogan for Apple was "Think Different." Apple Computers Inc. were the small guys with the big idea. All of Apple's advertising and marketing was aimed at converting people to the Mac dream. The most evangelical of these has to be Ridley Scott's commercial from 1984, that has since become an advertising classic. It showed the Macintosh, personified by a female runner, hurling a hammer at 'Big Brother', the computing establishment. This was the commercial that launched the first Mac. Significantly, this was also the first Apple commercial where the Mac was personified as a human being.

Among other technological innovations, the first Mac came with a mouse and a radically redesigned interface that used icons for the very first time. In terms of industrial design, however, the Mac tried very hard to find a way to be different. Seven design firms were chosen to present concepts for the design language that would define the look of the Mac. Out of these seven dwarves, Jobs finally chose the concept "Snow White": white monochromatic cuboids with curved edges designed by German designer Hartmut Esslinger. This look is exemplified by the Apple IIc and the Macintosh II, released in the late 1980's.

The real design revolution came in 1998, with the release of the iMac G3. Along with other design features such as portability and transparency, the iMac introduced colour into the world of computers. As a product, it helped revive the fortunes of Apple Computers Inc. and Steve Jobs. But the key introduction of colour changed the rules of the game in computer marketing. The computer was no longer just an appliance or an electronic tool. Neither was it a sacred and sophisticated piece of machinery that had to be handled with care. The iMac made the computer a personal object, an extension of the owner's identity. Apple was truly thinking different.

I'M A MAC



Which Mac are you?



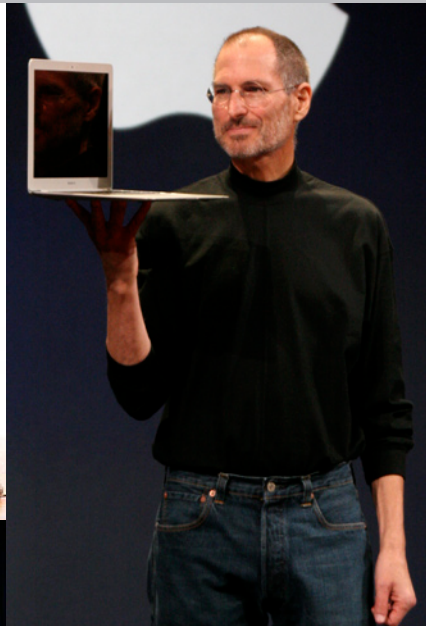
Clockwise from Top Left: *Mac Vs. PC in the new commercials; The PC needs protection, the Mac doesn't; The Mac makes things look better; "Which Mac are you?" from the Apple website.*

Fast forward to 2009, and the idea that the computer is a personal possession that expresses its owner's identity isn't so revolutionary anymore. Apple's competitors caught on rather quickly and jumped on to the bandwagon. HP ran a very successful advertising campaign on the tagline "The computer is personal again." Sony and Dell both began to offer colour customization in their computers and laptops. Soon, the industry trend progressed beyond colour, and users can now purchase laptops that incorporate artwork by prominent digital artists.

In the meantime, Apple had diversified its product range. It introduced the iPod, which spawned a revolution of its own. The computers had moved through the G4, G5 and MacPro models, and the laptops went from iBooks to the Macbook series: Macbook, Macbook Pro, and Macbook Air. Yes, the Apple computers were Macs again, and this time they truly deserved the name. Jonathan Ive carefully worked his way towards an aesthetic that is so generic that it stands out. The monochromatic cuboidal shapes were back, but handled this time with a sensitivity and precision worthy of Dieter Rams and Ulm. Minimalism in industrial design became the hallmark of Apple design, aided by a colour palette strictly limited to aluminium, white and black. With the exception of their cheapest product, the iPod Nano, this austere design language was applied to every single Mac. When Apple's website asks, "Which Mac are you?" it almost seems a joke. Except for variations in size, all the Macs look the same.

But the framing of that question is no joke. It reflects the way that Apple and its loyal customers have begun to see their Macs in relation to themselves. The Mac no longer has to fit the personality of its user, it has a personality all of its own. And you can see this person in the latest commercials for Apple. The PC is played by a stuffy, balding, middle aged man in a suit, trying a little too hard to appear cool and up to date. The Mac is a cool, confident youth in a t-shirt and jeans, who doesn't have to try at all. No more heavy convincing required, no more hammers needed. It is just plain common sense that the Mac is better. You're just a regular guy if you use a Mac.

STEVE JOBS IS THE ULTIMATE MAC



Clockwise from Top Left:
Steve Jobs in a 1985 photograph;
The transformation is complete:
Steve Jobs at the Macworld
Conference & Expo, 2008;
Jobs at the launch of the iPhone.



If the Mac is the personification of its user, then surely Steve Jobs is the personification of Apple Inc. Over the years, he has become a widely admired cult figure. Thousands of his followers, who affectionately call themselves Macheads, assemble every year to hear him speak at the Macworld Conference and Expo. Jobs' presence at this annual event, where new Apple products are traditionally launched, is critical to the image of Apple Inc. When he could not be present at Macworld 2009 due to health reasons, Apple stock actually lost value.

The image of Steve Jobs has also changed over the years, with the changing face of Apple and the Mac. A photograph of him from 1985, with the newly launched Macintosh, shows a smiling young businessman in a suit. If that smiling business man put on a few pounds and lost some hair, he might have become the suited middle-aged PC in the new Mac commercials. But Steve Jobs was quick to re-invent himself. No more suits, no more standard corporate publicity shots. Today, Steve Jobs carefully dresses like Average Joe, in a black turtleneck t-shirt and Levi's 501 blue jeans. It isn't a stretch of imagination to see that the Mac in the new commercials is the 1985 Steve Jobs who dresses like today's Steve Jobs.

At what is possibly the height of its commercial success, Apple Inc. delivers a remarkably consistent message to all existing and potential Macheads. The multi-millionaire Steve Jobs who dresses like you and me is the perfect allegory for computers that hide superior performance behind a polished but minimal exterior. Apple Inc. has understood that portraying itself as Average Joe while delivering above-average products has an irresistible allure. It has turned its nickname into a powerful weapon. For once, Shakespeare has been proved wrong. That which we call a Mac, by any other name wouldn't sell as sweet.